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ABSTRACT

Suggesting that instructors approach literature from a multidisciplinary life-based stance, this paper presents syllabi, pedagogical techniques, and a student essay which illustrates a life-based approach to literary themes. The first section of the paper deals with creative curricular re-packaging of great literature in which traditional course structure is supplemented by theme of genre-based courses. The second section of the paper begins with quoted substantiation from two recent authoritative sources and then focuses on some pedagogical techniques to enliven great literature for today's students. The third section of the paper is part of an illustrative student essay which applies literature as life to critical essay writing. (RS)

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PRESENTATION:

**TEACHING LIFE: RE-CREATING AND RE-TEACHING LITERATURE:
CONCEPTION TO INSTRUCTION**

PRESENTER:

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Tuesday May 24, 1994

2:15-3:15 pm

Radisson/Capitol

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**TEACHING LIFE: RE-CREATING AND RE-TEACHING LITERATURE:
CONCEPTION TO INSTRUCTION**

PREFACE

In our age of rampant anti-literacy, litera-phobic censorship and self-limiting careerism, the cultural dark night of the soul chillingly forecast by Ray Bradbury over 40 years ago, how do we keep education in general and the Liberal Arts in particular alive and well? We will not accomplish this worthy goal through curricular and instructional stagnation or ossification, nor will we do so through capitulation to the mediocrity of popular "culture." We will, however, re-vitalize literacy and the entire educational process which is dependent on literacy through creative curricular and pedagogical re-conceptions: re-presenting wonderful old "wine" in shinier new "bottles."

Re-vitalizing Liberal Arts course work depends on two conceptualizations: imaginative re-packaging and dynamic re-teaching. For example, provocative, multi-generic, thematic literature courses (or units) excite students and instructors alike.

However, mere curricular re-packaging is insufficient if the professor employs calcified teaching techniques or relies solely on narrowly trendy critical paradigms. The instructor must approach literature from a multi-disciplinary life-based stance. Literature should no longer be taught as an end in itself, self-contained, inaccessibly housed in a gilded china closet to be admired only from afar. A Life-based approach teaches literary themes as a means to an end, as a window on life, a vehicle towards the discovery and re-understanding of human experience.

CONTENTS

THE FIRST SECTION OF THIS DOCUMENT DEALS WITH CREATIVE CURRICULAR RE-PACKAGING OF GREAT LITERATURE IN WHICH TRADITIONAL COURSE STRUCTURE (e.g. Survey of British Literature) IS SUPPLEMENTED BY THEME OR GENRE-BASED COURSES SUCH AS THOSE OUTLINED IN THE FOLLOWING PAGES.

One cannot teach students to enjoy and celebrate literature as life unless students choose to sign up for literature courses. Creative re-packaging of great literature in no way diminishes literature's greatness but simply re-presents it in a way with which students can identify. Students who would never register for Survey of American Literature do sign up for The Modern American Family in Literature. Students who are terrified of Introduction to Literature do choose to take The Short Story. These non-traditional educational experiences are as valid and enriching as the traditional ones.

THE SECOND SECTION OF THIS DOCUMENT BEGINS WITH QUOTED SUBSTANTIATION FROM TWO RECENT AUTHORITATIVE SOURCES AND THEN FOCUSES ON SOME PEDAGOGICAL TECHNIQUES TO ENLIVEN GREAT LITERATURE FOR TODAY'S STUDENTS

THE THIRD SECTION OF THIS DOCUMENT IS PART OF AN ILLUSTRATIVE STUDENT ESSAY WHICH APPLIES LITERATURE AS LIFE TO CRITICAL ESSAY WRITING

SECTION ONE

POLK COMMUNITY COLLEGE, WINTER HAVEN & LAKE LAND, FL

SYLLABUS FOR LIT 1313: SCIENCE FICTION LITERATURE (H.Kerner)

Course description: This course examines the ways in which classic science fiction literature relates to society and our lives today. Such themes as irresponsibility, dehumanization, abuse, censorship, xenophobia, sexism and the illusion of progress are related to today's headlines through the classic novels and short stories of great male and female science fiction writers.

SCIENTIFIC, "PARENTAL," & SOCIAL IRRESPONSIBILITY:
FRANKENSTEIN by Mary Shelley

SOCIAL DARWINISM & THE ILLUSION OF PROGRESS:
THE TIME MACHINE by H.G. Wells

XENOPHOBIA, SPECIEISM, & ANTHROPOMORPHISM:
THE WAR OF THE WORLDS by H.G. Wells

THE ILLUSION OF HUMAN SUPERIORITY:
2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY by Arthur C. Clarke

HORROR & HUMAN APATHY: "THAT ONLY A MOTHER" by Judith Merrill
CHILD OR ALIEN ABUSE?: "BORN OF MAN & WOMAN" by Richard Matheson

CRUELTY TO THE "DIFFERENT": "FLOWERS FOR ALGERNON" by Daniel Keyes

TREATMENT OF THE ELDERLY: "NIGHT CALL" by Richard Matheson

THE ILLUSION OF EQUALITY: "HARRISON BERGERON" By Kurt Vonnegut

SOCIOPATHIC CHILDREN & TV: "THE VELDT" by Ray Bradbury

WOMEN & MEN AS STRANGERS: **THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS** by Ursula LeGuin

IMPLICATIONS OF CENSORSHIP: **FAHRENHEIT 451** by Ray Bradbury

LIT 1313: SCIENCE FICTION LITERATURE

SOME THEMES TO TRACE FOR DISCUSSION & WRITING

XENOPHOBIA

"THE OTHER"

The Left Hand of Darkness
The Veldt
Frankenstein
Time Machine
Harrison Bergeron
Flowers for Algernon
War of the Worlds
Fahrenheit 451

PROGRESS?

The Time Machine
2001
The Veldt
Harrison Bergeron
Frankenstein
Left Hand of Darkness
Fahrenheit 451

DEHUMANIZATION

The Time Machine
The Veldt
Night Call
Born of Man & Woman
Flowers for Algernon
That Only A Mother
War of the Worlds
Left Hand of Darkness

SCIENCE & MISUSE

Flowers for Algernon
2001
The Time Machine
Frankenstein

RESPONSIBILITY?

Frankenstein
Flowers for Algernon
The Veldt
Born of Man & Woman

HORROR

Frankenstein
Born of Man & Woman
That Only A Mother
2001
Night Call
The Time Machine

PARENTS FROM HELL!

Frankenstein
The Veldt
Born of Man & Woman
That Only A Mother
Harrison Bergeron

TAKING US AWAY
FROM OURSELVES
TO SEE OURSELVES
MORE CLEARLY

2001
Flowers for Algernon
The Veldt
Fahrenheit 451
et. al.

INTERPERSONAL
RELATIONS

Frankenstein
Flowers for Algernon
Born of Man & Woman
Left Hand of Darkness

ILLUSION OF HUMAN
SUPERIORITY

War of the Worlds
2001
Time Machine
Left Hand of Darkness
Frankenstein

POLK COMMUNITY COLLEGE, WINTER HAVEN & LAKE LAND, FL

SYLLABUS FOR LIT 1301: CURRENT INTEREST THEMES: WOMEN & MEN
IN LITERATURE (H. Kerner)

Course description: This course is an examination of the contrasting ways in which modern male and female writers portray men, women, and male-female relationships. Short stories, drama, poetry and novels about love, family, communication, identity, individuality, friendship, manipulation, betrayal and reconciliation will be studied.

WOMEN AS VICTIMS OF SUFFOCATION, MANIPULATION & SYMBIOSIS:

"THE YELLOW WALLPAPER" by Charlotte Perkins Gilman

"TO ROOM 19" by Doris Lessing

"LET ME PROMISE YOU" by Morley Callaghan

VANITY, MANIPULATION, ABANDONMENT, & PARALYSIS: AS MEN SEE MEN & WOMEN-

"O YOUTH & BEAUTY" by John Cheever

"HILLS LIKE WHITE ELEPHANTS" by Ernest Hemingway

"A ROSE FOR EMILY" by William Faulkner

"EVELINE" by James Joyce

FROM SUFFOCATION TO FREEDOM, RELEASE & HOPE:

"THE STORY OF AN HOUR" by Kate Chopin

"THE STORM" by Kate Chopin

"DESIREE'S BABY" by Kate Chopin

"THE SNIPE HUNTERS" by Leigh Allison Wilson

LOVE: A MALE & FEMALE PERSPECTIVE- **A SUMMER STORY** (film)
based on "The Apple Tree" by John Galsworthy

LOVE VS. SOCIETY: **ORPHEUS DESCENDING** by Tennessee Williams +
film adaptation

WOMAN AS ICE PRINCESS: **HEDDA GABLER** by Henrik Ibsen + film
adaptation

LOVING FRIENDSHIP: "**JULIA**" from Pentimento by Lillian Hellman
+ film adaptation

FAMILY, CONFLICT & TRIUMPH: **A RAISIN IN THE SUN** by Lorraine
Hansberry + stage production on film

IDENTITY & LOVE CONFUSED: **THE HEART IS A LONELY HUNTER** by
Carson McCullers + film adaptation

GUILT & SHAME; FAMILY OR STRANGERS?: **ORDINARY PEOPLE** by
Judith Guest + film -5-

LIT 1301: CURRENT INTEREST THEMES: WOMEN & MEN IN LITERATURE

SOME THEMES TO TRACE FOR DISCUSSION & WRITING

WISH-FULFILLMENT

The Heart is a Lonely Hunter
Ordinary People
A Raisin in the Sun
A Rose for Emily
O Youth & Beauty

DISILLUSIONMENT

The Story of An Hour
To Room 19
Desiree's Baby
Hedda Gabler
A Raisin in the Sun
The Heart is a Lonely Hunter
Ordinary People

SOCIAL STRICTURES

Orpheus Descending
Ordinary People
A Summer Story
Desiree's Baby
A Raisin in the Sun
A Rose for Emily
The Yellow Wallpaper
To Room 19
The Story of an Hour

HYPOCRISY

The Snipe Hunters
Orpheus Descending
A Rose for Emily
Let Me Promise You
Desiree's Baby

FRIENDSHIP

Julia
The Snipe Hunters
Ordinary People
The Heart is a Lonely Hunter
A Raisin in the Sun

CONTROL

Ordinary People
A Raisin in the Sun
The Yellow Wallpaper
Let Me Promise You

NEED & FEAR OF LOVE

A Summer Story
Eveline
Ordinary People
Heart is A Lonely Hunt.
Let Me Promise You
Hedda Gabler
Orpheus Descending

LONELINESS

Eveline
A Rose for Emily
Orpheus Descending
Hedda Gabler
Heart is a Lonely Hunt.
Ordinary People
To Room 19

POOR COMMUNICATION

Ordinary People
Heart is A Lonely Hunt.
Hills Like White Eleph.

ISOLATION

Ordinary People
Heart is A Lonely Hunt.
To Room 19
Hedda Gabler
Yellow Wallpaper
Orpheus Descending

POLK COMMUNITY COLLEGE, WINTER HAVEN & LAKE LAND, FL

SYLLABUS FOR **LIT 1301: CURRENT INTEREST THEMES: THE MODERN
AMERICAN FAMILY IN LITERATURE** (H. Kerner)

Course description: This course is an examination of the sociological and psychological pressures, challenges and crises that beset the ever-evolving modern American family. Themes such as sibling rivalry, betrayal, non-communication, abuse as well as love, bonding and triumph are discussed as they are revealed in modern literature.

FRATERNAL RIVALRY, MODERN CAIN & ABEL: **TRUE WEST** by Sam
Shepard

HEARTBREAK, RETRIBUTION & REDEMPTION: **LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO
NIGHT** by Eugene O'Neill

FAMILY RITUALS: **THE DINING ROOM** by A.R. Gurney

FAMILY CRISIS & TRIUMPH: **A RAISIN IN THE SUN** by Lorraine
Hansberry

THREE GENERATIONS OF DYSFUNCTIONAL COMMUNICATION:
GROWNUPS by Jules
Feiffer

A FAMILY OF FRIENDS: **STEEL MAGNOLIAS** by Robert Harling

POLK COMMUNITY COLLEGE, WINTER HAVEN & LAKELAND, FL

SYLLABUS FOR LIT 2090: CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE (H. Kerner)

Course description: This course is a study of literary movements and themes since the mid-twentieth century which parallel important international issues. Students will read, write about and discuss literary works which concern multi-ethnic awareness and understanding among other major sociological, historical and psychological phenomena and issues which shape our world

AIDS: **AN EARLY FROST** (film) OR **AND THE BAND PLAYED ON** (film)

THE HOLOCAUST: **NIGHT** by Elie Wiesel & **PLAYING FOR TIME** (film)

APARTHEID: **MASTER HAROLD & THE BOYS** by Athol Fugard

FROM BIGOTRY TO TRIUMPH: **I KNOW WHY THE CAGED BIRD SINGS** by Maya Angelou

THE BRUTALITY OF TRADITIONAL SEXISM: **POSSESSING THE SECRET OF JOY** by Alice Walker

THEATRE OF THE ABSURD: **"THE BALD SOPRANO"** by Eugene Ionesco

THE ANTI-HERO: **SEIZE THE DAY** by Saul Bellow

BUSINESS ETHICS? **GLENGARRY GLEN ROSS** by David Mamet (film)

LOVE IN THE '90's: **FRANKIE & JOHNNY IN THE CLAIR DE LUNE** by Terrence McNally

THE AMERICAN MUSICAL THEATRE: **INTO THE WOODS** by James Lapine and Stephen Sondheim and/or **SWEENEY TODD** by Hugh Wheeler & Stephen Sondheim and/or **PIPPIN** by Stephen Schwartz & Roger Hirson

JEFFERSON COMMUNITY COLLEGE, Watertown, NY

SYLLABUS FOR **ENGLISH 171: THE SHORT STORY** (H. Kerner)

Course description: Students learn to appreciate and understand the short story form in literature.

Introduction to the Short Story

"THE SECRET LIFE OF WALTER MITTY" by James Thurber

HUMAN NATURE

"THE TRAIN FROM RHODESIA" by Nadine Gordimer

"A GOOD MAN IS HARD TO FIND" by Flannery O'Connor

BY AND ABOUT WOMEN

"TO ROOM NINETEEN" by Doris Lessing

"THE YELLOW WALLPAPER" by Charlotte Perkins Gilman

"THE SNIPE HUNTERS" by Leigh Allison Wilson

GOTHICISM

"THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER" by Edgar Allan Poe

"THE TELL-TALE HEART" by Edgar Allan Poe

INITIATION

"A WHITE HERON" by Sarah Orne Jewett

"ARABY" by James Joyce

"THE MAN WHO WAS ALMOST A MAN" by Richard Wright

ALIENATION AND HUMAN LIMITATION

"BARTLEBY THE SCRIVENER" by Herman Melville

MEN VS. WOMEN

"TICKETS, PLEASE" by D.H. Lawrence

"THE GIRLS IN THEIR SUMMER DRESSES" by Irwin Shaw

LOVE?

"THE STORY OF AN HOUR" by Kate Chopin

"THE STORM" by Kate Chopin

MORE LOVE?

"LET ME PROMISE YOU" by Morley Callaghan

"A ROSE FOR EMILY" by William Faulkner

"BROKEN MIRRORS" by Leigh Allison Wilson

AGING AND MORTALITY

"A VISIT OF CHARITY" by Eudora Welty

"O YOUTH AND BEAUTY" by John Cheever

"FROM THE BOTTOM UP" by Leigh Allison Wilson

PERCEPTIONS OF DEATH

"THE DEATH OF IVAN ILYCH" by Leo Tolstoy

FUTURISM

"THERE WILL COME SOFT RAINS" by Ray Bradbury

"THE VELDT" by Ray Bradbury

"HARRISON BERGERON" by Kurt Vonnegut

SOCIETY VS. THE INDIVIDUAL

"WAR PRAYER" by Mark Twain

"THE LOTTERY" by Shirley Jackson

PREVIEWS OF COMING "DISTRACTIONS"
OR
POTENTIAL FUTURE "CURRENT INTEREST THEME" LITERATURE COURSES

FRIENDSHIP IN LITERATURE

THE LITERATURE OF LOVE

TYPES OF COMEDY IN LITERATURE

YOUTH IN LITERATURE...

SECTION TWO

from TOWARD DE-CENTRALIZING THE STUDY OF LITERATURE
or
WHO DO WE THINK WE ARE?

"...I recall that I was led to love literature at an early age--probably much like you were -- because it was better than real life. Not that my life was that bad, but literature--stories--were better. Better because they took me to places I had never been, and where I could never go; they took me on adventures, both physical and mental and emotional, which--no matter how frightening--were always safe; in literature, my life had beginnings, middles and endings, some happy, some not, but usually resolution--and always experience.

That's what literature was to me as a child and as a young adult. Experience beyond human capacity. Compressed experience. Controlled experience. The best and worst experience. Literature was taught this way once: as experience, as all that the world has experienced, all that humanity has experienced, so that you, the reader of literature, could mature individually as much as the world has matured collectively.

That's who I think we are, who we should be.

I have never understood why the 'Humanities' were isolated in one corner of the campus. The campus is alive with humanity, each discipline in its own way. And I know I am not the first to complain about this fragmentation and specialization. Beyond the corollary qualities of language and theory, literature is just an alternate reality for the time one is immersed in its pages. And that's all it should be, as far as I'm concerned...

Literature is life; life is art; all the world's a stage. We say it many ways. And a "well-read" person of today is simply one who has more experience of the world than is humanly possible without literature --literature is--slash--as human experience, cumulative human experience.

So let us abolish the wrongly named English Department. Those who teach writing--to the Writing Department, and those who wish to teach literature to the newly named Department of Human Experience--that unique discipline on campus where we ask and answer only one question: Who do we think we are?"

-12-

- Professor Bradley R. Bowers
Barry University
Miami, FL

(delivered at Florida College English Association Conf. 1/92)

from "THE I'S HAVE IT; DUKE'S 'MOI' CRITICS EXPOSE
THEMSELVES"

"'...Somehow or other, higher education has evolved so that it puts students in touch neither with the world out there nor with themselves...and I think it needs to move in both directions.'

She (Dr. Jane Tompkins of Duke University) has also changed her classroom behavior. A course she taught in the Fall of 1992, American Literature Unbound, involved a field trip to the beach; the catalog description was mocked in The New Republic. Unabashed, she tells me that in the last few years her teaching 'has not really been about explaining literature, it's really been more about getting people to come out of themselves and find out what they want, who they are, and what their relation to a text is. Literature becomes a kind of occasion or excuse for all this.'"

- Adam Begley, Lingua Franca, March/April 1994

TOWARDS A "DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE"
OR
WHAT DO YOU PROFESS?

Dr. Tompkins' desire to put her students in touch with themselves and the world clearly achieves fruition in the "Experience beyond human capacity. Compressed experience. Controlled experience. The best and worst experience" which Professor Bowers finds in literature.

Great literature gives us a unique perspective on every aspect of human experience: love, loneliness, courage, cowardice, cruelty, yearning, et. al. By clearly elucidating these themes in class and by tying these themes to universal and contemporary sociological, psychological and personal human experience, we vivify and animate what are, for many college students, merely black words on a white page. This is not a monomaniacal approach. We need not eliminate or degrade any theoretical, structural or even biographical approach to literature but we must also prove to our students that literature is not a "wall" of knowledge to be memorized, a list of literary terms to know, but a vehicle, a "bridge" through which we learn about ourselves and the world and people around us.

Nikos Kazantzakis writes that the finest teachers are facilitators of learning who become bridges over which they encourage their students to cross. Afterwards, these teachers encourage students to build their own bridges. Here are a few ways in which professors of Literature can act as bridges to the discovery and understanding of human experience.

Instead of focusing solely on the memorization of literary terms or asking such literal-level questions as, "What new character appears in Chapter 3?" we need to select passages from the text about which to ask, "Such and such happens in this world. What does this phenomenon have to do with what the writer is saying in this passage? Do you agree with the writer's point of view on this problem?"

In addition to contenting ourselves when a student can pick out the denouement of a short story, we need to say, "This passage -- relate it to what is happening in our world/community." Instead of being relieved only when a student can pick out an example of irony in the text, we need to also ask, "When this character says ---, what does he/she really mean? Is this character being honest with

him/herself? What inferences about our lives and behavior can we draw from this behavior? Do you know people who behave like this sometimes? Why do they do so?"

Instead of being satisfied only when a student can deliver a written or oral presentation on the biography of a famous writer, we need to also ask, "Where else in the text does this writer bring up ideas about strange aspects of human behavior such as denial? Cite relevant passages." Rather than requiring students to write an essay on an author's use of setting, encourage students to explore, for example, the internal loneliness (within a person) and the external loneliness (among people) in a novel, citing passages from the text in defense of their thesis.

Instead of insisting that students write a mechanical essay on the structure of a literary selection, encourage them to use textual references to explore the ways in which personal, social and scientific irresponsibility or appearance vs. reality or the abuse of children and the elderly or fear of the "different" or the results of excessive pride or the manipulation and subjugation of women are operative in the work in question. Instead of having students memorize vocabulary words in a story, examine the connotations of a writer's language and how the evocative qualities of language affect the results of our own speech and writing.

After some practice, with modeling from the professor, students of all ability levels will create exciting and provocative thematic or character-driven, human and life-related essay and discussion topics. Literature students should be encouraged to explore any aspect of the work which elucidates an important theme or idea for them so long as they justify their point of view with references to the text.

As Professor Bowers wisely suggests, in order to re-energize our own teaching and inspire and involve our students in the gift that is literature, we need to get back in touch with that which first excited and allured us about reading. When we re-find that joy in ourselves - the ways in which we happily and tearfully learned about life, ourselves and our world through books read in our teens and since - we will find that our students are ripe to "catch" that gloriously contagious "fever" and find their own joy. When we prove to them that literature clearly is life, through creative and imaginative curricular work and teaching technique, literature lovers (there are still some out there!) and "closet readers" feel validated and non-readers discover and get hooked on the life-giving excitement of literature.

-15-

Welcome to the new "Department of Human Experience!" No single factor has had more impact on the enormous success of my literature courses than the enthusiastic equation that literature equals life. Know the joy when years later, students send you a newspaper clipping and scribble, "This really reminded me of Mary Shelley's ideas" or "I was so excited about our course that now, three years later, I have finally read all of Carson McCullers' works" or "Because of that character in the book we read in your class, I got help for a friend of mine who wanted to commit suicide" or "I got the courage to get out of that sick relationship I was in because of those stories we read where women were abused" or "I'm enclosing as a gift an early edition of that book you taught us in that course, a book I've re-read often and love!" or "Now I learn so much about myself when I read."

Teach all the theories you wish so long as you move your students beyond the literal to the inferential and even evaluative levels of cognition in order to also emphasize literature as life. Ask yourselves: Do you fill students' minds or open them? Are you a "wall" or a "bridge?" Literature professors, what do you profess?

-Howard A. Kerner

SECTION THREE

In the American culture of 1994, there seems to be a growing fragmentation in human relationships. There are so many special interest groups all fighting for political dominance in order that their voice be heard and their "demands" be heeded. Everyone, it seems, is so concerned with their "rights and freedoms," and no one is willing to be tolerant of anyone else's views. And the result is an increasingly splintered and factioned society. But in all this cry for freedom, what part does responsibility play? Freedom with impunity leads to decadence, and ultimately to anarchy. One can find, by examining elements of this course's selection of literature, examples to illustrate the need for social responsibility.

First, one must take responsibility for one's actions. One cannot act according to one's whims without expecting there to be consequences. And if one acts in a way that the larger community deems improper, he should expect to pay the price. In our day, it is almost "vogue" to commit crime and then shift the blame away from oneself. One classic example of this is in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, the tale of the quintessential careless scientist and the consequences of his actions. Victor is a driven, ambitious man with great goals: "So much has been done . . . more, far more will I achieve. Treading in steps already marked, I will pioneer a new way,

explore unknown powers and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation (45)." His greed soon becomes a tyrannical force, and he sets sail for the greatest discovery ever: the creation of life. This new life is a ghastly, monstrous being, and when abandoned by Victor, he tries to gain his creator's attentions through violence. Victor totally divorces himself from the guilt he feels for the deaths his child causes: "I felt as if I had committed some great crime, the consciousness of which haunted me. I was innocent, but had indeed drawn down a horrible curse upon my head, as mortal as that of crime (193-4)." By continuing to ignore the voice of his conscience rather than act upon it and accept his guilt, he allows the continuation of the monster's tirade against his loved ones. So one can see how shifting blame affects not only oneself, but the community at large. However, in typical '90's fashion, the monster also shifts blame, claiming "I am malicious because I am miserable (172)." In other words, I am completely justified in my actions because of the way I feel. Granted, it would be lonely to live, as the monster describes, "shunned and hated by all mankind," but that cannot be justification for serial killing. In our time, the monster would go to trial, go through psychiatric evaluation, be reassured that his mass murder does not make him a bad person, and then be given a sickeningly light sentence because of his "illness." Consider the plight of John Merrick, the "Elephant Man": his

fate was much the same as that of the monster's, yet he maintained a gentle, loving, forgiving spirit throughout his 23 years of life.

This ties directly into the second point, one's responsibility for the proper upbringing of one's children. One has a responsibility to ensure that one's children grow to become accomplishing, contributing members of a community, rather than social leeches looking only for handouts, or, as we have seen, mass murderers blaming their actions on their parents' lousy rearing. Once again, we can turn to Victor and child for an example. The monster eloquently entreats his creator, seeking his acceptance: "Oh Frankenstein, be not equitable to every other and trample upon me alone, to whom thy justice, and even thy clemency and affection, is most due (113)." His pleas are rejected with angry words of hate and revulsion. The monster confronts Victor on several occasions, being more emphatic each time, finally to declare "If I cannot inspire love, I will cause fear . . . (172)." Because of Victor's rejection, the monster feels completely justified in taking his actions against his "fellow" man: if my own creator does not love and accept me, then no one will. This attitude is so prevalent in our culture today. With so many children born out of wedlock, most of them abandoned by the parent (sometimes even in dumpsters), others born with a substance addiction gained from a mother who continues her usage during pregnancy, it is little wonder that children

today grow up with so much bitterness. Another example of how parental actions affect the attitude of the child can be seen in "Born of Man and Woman" by Richard Matheson, a chilling tale of a horribly different child kept chained in the cellar. The most attention he gets is when he is beaten by his parents. He is remarkably tolerant at first, but at the end of the story, resolves: "If they try to beat me again I'll hurt them. I will (443)." When a child resorts to violence as a result of bitterness, it becomes a way of life. When a child is taught violence by his parents, how much more deeply will it be ingrained in him? In our society, the family unit has become increasingly more fragmented. The '90's definition of family could almost be: two (sometimes) uninterested parents and their demanding, unruly and undisciplined children. Parents too often do not exercise authority over their children, and too often the children grow up to have no respect at all for authority. Values are taught by parents first, and in America, too many of the teachers are on strike.

And third, one has a responsibility to others for his direct actions and attitudes. Prejudice has long been a problem in our society, whether it be directed toward blacks, Jews, women, fat people, low income people, the handicapped (mentally or physically challenged) or even the bald ("follicly challenged!"). When one reads Ursula LeGuin's Left Hand of Darkness, one sees a tale of

confronting prejudice. Genly Ai is living among the Gethenians, a gender-neutral race. It is impossible at first for him to accept them as they are, and of his friend Estraven, says: "It was impossible to think of him as a woman, that dark, ironic, powerful presence near me in the firelit darkness, and yet whenever I thought of him as a man, I felt a sense of falseness, of imposture . . . (12)." He later described the Gethenians as "Neither man nor woman, neither and both, cyclic, lunar, metamorphosing under the hand's touch, changelings in the human cradle, they were no flesh of mine, no friends; no love between us (213)." A very basic distrust existed in the mind of Ai, which took him a long time to conquer. But conquer it he did. It is often difficult to overcome the discomfort of the unfamiliar, the different, especially if the difference is perceived as a threat. But prejudice also comes from seeing a difference as a weakness that can be dominated or exploited. In "Flowers For Algernon" by Daniel Keyes, the journal of a mentally retarded man reveals the prejudice that he is subjected to, and of which he is unaware. "Joe Carp said hey look where Charlie had his operashun what did they do Charlie put some brains in. That made me laff. Their really my friends and they like me (611)." This excerpt is only one example of the mistreatment by Charlie's "friends." This kind of exploitation is particularly atrocious, as no one is willing to defend the defenseless and call the offender to account,

making it a shared guilt. Our responsibility toward others is not only an accounting for our own actions, but also holding others accountable for theirs, as long as it is all done in love. For, to quote St. Paul summarizing the teachings of Jesus, "Love is the fulfillment of the law (Romans 13:10)."

In all this we see that we as individuals are free, but that freedom comes with the exercising of responsibility. The only alternative is the forced restriction of freedom -- one step away from socialism. We see, in miniature, elements of that in our society. Government regulations increase daily as more people whine for them to solve social problems through legislation. There are now dictionaries published that aid in the cultural enforcement of "political correctness" -- which is simply a synonym for socialism of thought. One can see a humorous example of governmentally enforced equality in the story "Harrison Bergeron" by Kurt Vonnegut Jr. But perhaps a more philosophical treatment is found in the film "Fahrenheit 451" by Ray Bradbury. It is the story of a society in which books are completely banned because, supposedly, books make people unhappy. The reader becomes dissatisfied with his or her life, and wishes he or she lived somewhere, sometime, or somehow else. "For everyone to be happy, we must all be made equal. So, we burn the books, Montag." It isn't that the books make people unhappy; the realization of their lack of freedom makes them

unhappy. But the freedom must be expressed responsibly. There is a very fine line between censorship and a community's right to maintain an established standard of conduct.

by Alan Siler
Science Fiction Literature